

ADVENTURES OF A POKER DAD



Some of the cast watch John Blowers on the monitor back when he was still on the show.

PHOTO: TONY WIND

Editor's Note: This is the last of a three-part series about book author and dream chaser John Blowers' adventures on Season 2 of Fox Sports' Best Damn Poker Show. Last month he was booted from the poker reality program when his A-K fell to a K-J after he played too passively and a jack spiked on the river. This month he shares his experiences post-elimination as the rest of the cast vies for poker supremacy.

SEPTEMBER 9, 1:30 P.M. PT

I'm off to the exit interviews. I speak with Andrew, who makes me relive my 5-7 limp and A-K disaster in painful detail. I chat with Hollywood Dave as the cameras roll. It sucks to relive this massive implosion, but he's fun about it and we chat about our respective gaming books before I head off to the poker room. The players are friendly and,

Living With the Public Shame of a Poker Mistake on TV

An Insider's Look at the 'Best Damn Poker Show'

by John Blowers

when they learn I was on the poker TV show, my raises get a little more respect, making the session a bit more profitable than the first night.

SEPTEMBER 10, 1:30 A.M. PT

Twelve hours and I'm still cranking in the poker room of the San Manuel Indian Casino east of Los Angeles, where the show was taped. I usually make this mis-

take of extending my sessions too long, but it's a fun table and I'm still ahead. I'm in seat nine at a nine-seat table. The guy in seat four has been opening 80 percent of the pots for a raise. The Middle-Eastern woman to his left is growing increasingly impatient with him. After about 70 hands of this, he does a rare pre-flop fold. I grab my still-handy *Poker For Dummies* book and slide it to him, suggesting he read a chapter before the next

hand. The players laugh and he takes the joke well, explaining he's still trying to learn more about the psychology of poker as he ships the book back across the felt. I tell him there's a better book to read and slide over a copy of my novel, *Life on Tilt*. He looks at the cover in amazement.

"Kenna James wrote the foreword?"

"He did. Great guy...not a bad poker player either," I respond.

"I'm best friends with his older son."

And another in an endless string of connections is made at the poker table. His name is Jeff and I autograph a copy of the book for him, as well as providing an audio version when he mentions his preference for this medium.

SEPTEMBER 10, 4:30 A.M. PT

After 15 hours of play, Jeff generously offers to give me a ride to my hotel. His friend Trevor joins us and we check out Trevor's band's new CD as we ride.

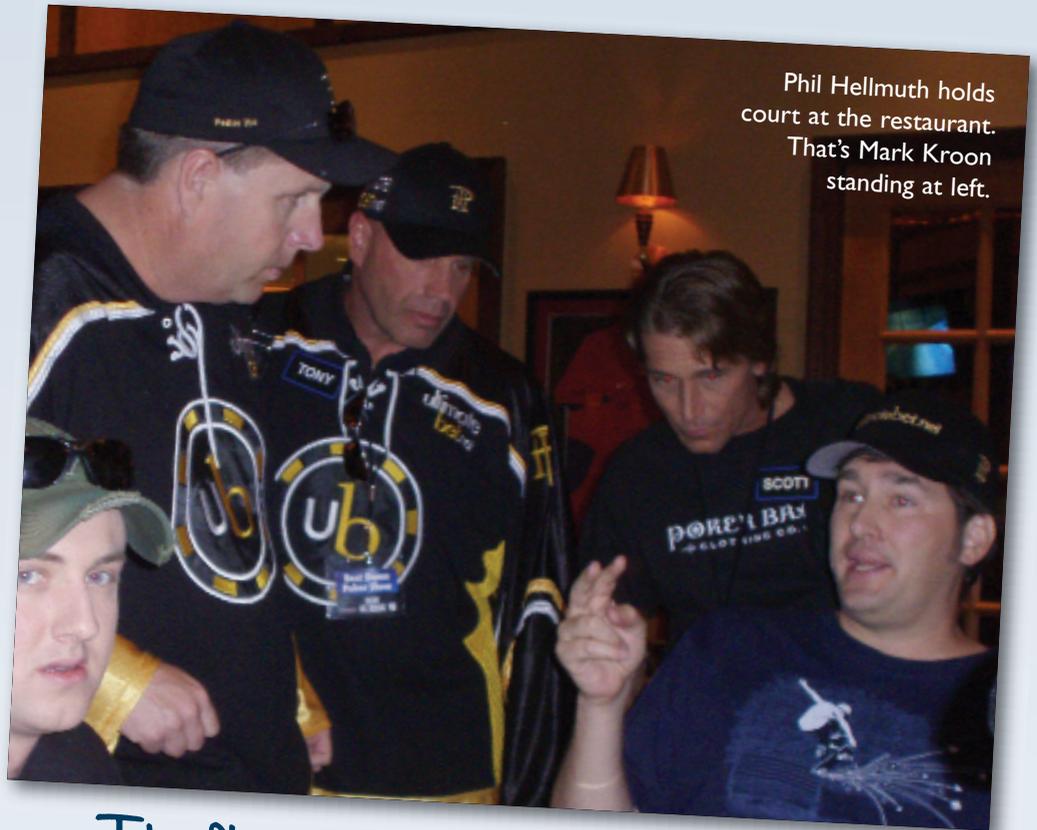
SEPTEMBER 10, 8:00 A.M. PT

Up for a phone interview with the corporate world, then back to bed by 9.

SEPTEMBER 10, 2:30 P.M. PT

I roll out of bed, return calls and check email before heading off to the casino. I make the mistake of joining a \$3-\$6 table while waiting for the \$4-\$8 kill game to open up. This is like watching paint dry. When I get to the \$4-\$8 kill, the action is good, with \$200 and \$300 pots being the norm. I hit four in a row and triple my \$200 in less than 20 minutes. Shortly thereafter I find a food voucher from the show and realize I haven't eaten all day.

I order a ridiculous amount of food and it arrives as Russian model and fellow Best Damn Poker Show contestant Olya P stops by. She's been eliminated and seems to think it's partially because they don't take her seriously due to her beauty. She's heading back to New York to rejoin "fashion week" in progress. I notice Hollywood Dave chatting up a girl at one of the tables...they seem to be together. I watch Annie Duke and Shawn Rice walk through the poker room chatting excitedly. Moments later,



Phil Hellmuth holds court at the restaurant. That's Mark Kroon standing at left.

The floor is called, lots of drama ensues and I end it by throwing \$8 into the pot, telling him to go get a happy meal

Phil Hellmuth walks through with Mark "Poker HO" Kroon in tow.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2:15 A.M. PT

Eleven hours into my session and games are breaking left and right, however, my table is still popping. There's a woman in seat seven who's a card rack. She's been chasing and catching all night. Right now she's raking in a \$300 kill pot on a board of J-9-7-Q-5 showing down J-5 against my pocket kings. Another in a series of brutal beats. But that's "no fold'em hold'em." If I want to protect quality hands, I should move to the no-limit table, but the action is really slow here at no-limit, so it's suckout city for me.

An hour later I'm playing six-handed against five locals who are all friendly with each other, and jackass poker starts to take over. I'm looking at a board of A-A-8-6-Q and I'm holding A-7. Seat seven now has a guy who looks like

Allen Iverson sitting there. He's first to act and whirls his hand in the air, while showing the player next to him his hand. The dealer turns to me and I show my hand. AI then puts out a bet. The dealer and I are confused. The floor is called, lots of drama ensues and I end it by throwing \$8 into the pot, telling him to go get a happy meal. He flips over Q-Q for the two-outer. It seems I should stay out of pots with seat seven, regardless of who is sitting there.

SEPTEMBER 11, 7:15 A.M. PT

My taxi drops me off at the hotel after a brutal session, resulting in me being down about \$300. The driver, Jose, and I had a nice chat as he described how poker is legal anywhere in Mexico and games are often played in restaurants and bars. I make a note to myself to pick up a Spanish-English dictionary and start planning my next vacation south of the border. Jose agrees to pick me up

ADVENTURES OF A POKER DAD

at 4 a.m. the next day to take me to the airport.

SEPTEMBER 11, 3:30 P.M. PT

I wake up and catch an episode of *Judge Judy*. The litigants are from the next town over from where I live in upstate New York and I think I recognize one of the witnesses for the plaintiff.

SEPTEMBER 11, 6:30 P.M. PT

I'm heading to the pool and exercise room for the first time, although I had promised myself I'd visit both daily. I run into Birmingham Brad in the lobby and he's asking where I've been. Everyone else has been hanging out backstage watching the filming. I drop the plans for exercise and pool and accept a dinner invitation instead.

SEPTEMBER 11, 7:10 P.M. PT

I'm at the Black Angus, a steakhouse near the hotel, sitting next to Annie Duke, who seems pleased to see me after my two-day absence. She's arranging play dates for her kids. There are about 20 of the contestants and show people here to eat the majority of a small cow. Well, most of us...Annie doesn't eat red meat.

There was great drama on the show today. The player who finished in sixth place took off without doing an exit interview. It turns out he won a trip to UltimateBet's million-dollar tournament in Aruba, but no one knows how to contact him. Also, Scotty – the guy with the colorful past – had a meltdown on the show. Down to four players left, he had 76k in chips with the blinds at 2k-4k when he dropped an F-bomb. Tournament Director Matt gave him a four-hand penalty and Scotty lost it, eventually storming off the set and catching a cab back to the hotel. The cameras followed and filmed him lashing out at staff and fellow players at the hotel alike as he checked out and headed for the airport. This effectively gave the win to team Annie, leaving Phil winless in two seasons. I could hear him now, "If there weren't mental break-

Next time, I'll play like an Internet player on crack. Raise every pot and throw a tantrum when I get busted out for overplaying A-K

downs involved, I'd win every one of these things."

The bill comes and a bunch of degenerate gamblers wager close to \$3000 on how much the bill is. Phil's giving action with \$1400 as the over/under. Most people hit the under hard and celebrate when Annie shows the bill at \$1,362.59. One player carefully estimated the bill at \$1130 pre-tip. Turns out it was \$1,132.28. Poker players never cease to amaze me with their unusual talents.

SEPTEMBER 11, 11:15 P.M. PT

It's the anniversary of 9/11 and I'm back in the room watching MSNBC rerun footage from the events of seven years ago. The emotions from that time are instantly brought to the surface. Rage, anger, fear...although less acute than when the events actually took place. We all remember where we were on that fateful day. The same as a generation and a half earlier, everyone recalls where they were when JFK was assassinated. Three days prior to Sept 11, 2001, I was sitting around a table playing .25-.50 "card after the queen" poker with some friends and hold'em was still two years in my future. How times have changed.

SEPTEMBER 12, 3:55 A.M. PT

Jose picks me up and we're off to the Ontario airport. He speaks fondly of poker and I add an autographed copy of my book to my cash tip. I reflect on my appearance, albeit brief, on Best Damn Poker Show and consider the ribbing I'll get from folks

about misplaying the big slick hand. Quite a way to start a TV legacy.

SEPTEMBER 12, 10:45 P.M. ET

I'm home and out of a tournament when my kings get cracked by A-7 when the flop comes Q-7-7 and I don't improve. Now I'm watching David Benyamine and Patrik Antonius duke it out on a \$500-\$1000 no-limit table. Benyamine has \$970k on the table and Patrik doubles up through other players to \$250k. One player has reloaded \$50k four times. Too rich for my blood.

I head upstairs and catch the last part of *Maverick*. I come in just before the scene where Mel Gibson calls all his chips blind drawing to a straight flush. He hits the prettiest card in the deck – the ace of spades – to win. He probably wouldn't have checked down A-K against K-J, I chastise myself.

SEPTEMBER 13, 9:30 A.M. ET

I'm sitting on the back porch reflecting on my "ultimate poker experience." Playing poker on television definitely changes the game. Knowing two of the top pros are analyzing your moves and a national audience will be able to see your mistakes repeated each time the show airs can certainly cause players to alter their style.

As I write this article, the show has not aired yet, therefore I can't comment on my appearance. However, I would definitely do two things differently. First, I'd get more than seven hours sleep in the 72 hours leading up to the taping. Second, I'd play like an Internet player on crack. Raise every pot and throw a tantrum when I get busted out for overplaying A-K.

Because *that's* the show's definition of the ultimate poker player! ♠



John Blowers is the author of *Life on Tilt: Confessions of a Poker Dad* (www.lifeontilt.com). You can contact him at johnblowers@lifeontilt.com.